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ABSTRACT

In rural coastal communities, trade-offs between conserving and developing environmentally sensitive resources are acute. At the community level, part-time volunteers and citizen officials are asked to make complex decisions based on ambiguous and frequently contradictory "scientific" evidence of economic and environmental relationships. The conditions surrounding these decisions often are characterized by limited access to information and conflict about the choices available and their consequences. This paper summarizes one community's efforts to integrate technical and social-economic information in a series of educational events leading to informed community consensus about the use of the community's waterfront. In Oconto, Wisconsin, on Lake Michigan's Green Bay, the waterfront is a fragile wetland resource that could be used in several different and potentially conflicting ways. A University of Wisconsin extension team that has provided development assistance to the area for the past decade undertook to facilitate the community's discussions of competing options. The team moved away from the conventional model of community intervention to one featuring emergent and flexible design, cyclic process, synergy between external and indigenous knowledge, holistic approach, and inclusion of diverse interests. The project demonstrated that judicious use of community surveys; a "locally acceptable" facilitator; a local advisory committee; and the cyclic process of asking, listening, analyzing, and reporting can identify local preferences and generate community energy for specific options. Contains 23 references. (SV)

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BUILDING COMMUNITY BASED INITIATIVES IN RURAL COASTAL COMMUNITIES

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Center for Community Economic Development
University of Wisconsin-Extension
Staff Paper 95.2

BUILDING COMMUNITY BASED INITIATIVES IN RURAL COASTAL COMMUNITIES

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BUILDING COMMUNITY BASED INITIATIVES IN RURAL COASTAL COMMUNITIES

In rural coastal communities, the trade offs between conserving and developing environmentally sensitive resources are particularly acute. Many coastal communities are especially vulnerable to both economic development and environmental protection pressures because of the popularity of the waterfront and conflicting interests of various stakeholders.

At the community level, part-time volunteers and citizen officials are asked to make increasingly complex decisions based on ambiguous and frequently contradictory "scientific" evidence of economic and environmental relationships. The conditions surrounding these decisions often are characterized by limited access to information to help make the decisions and conflict about the choices available and their consequences.

This manuscript summarizes the efforts of one community to integrate technical (engineering, biological, etc.) and social-economic information in a series of educational events leading to a more informed community consensus about the use of the Oconto waterfront. The project team sought to demonstrate and evaluate an innovative approach for smaller coastal communities to identify waterfront development options consistent with the community's broad economic, social, and environmental goals. This project did not presume that further construction on the waterfront was either economically or environmentally feasible or a universally accepted goal in the community. Rather the project team sought to work with the community to determine the directions and actions desired.

The project tests an approach to help coastal communities re-evaluate their waterfront resources[1] and sort out several potentially conflicting waterfront uses. Historically, this value derives from the use of waterfront resources in such commercial activities as shipping, fishing, sites for upscale housing, or upscale recreational investments and activities. New sources of value arise from the waterfront's natural amenities and place much more emphasis on its aesthetic qualities. The shift in sources of value requires alternative strategies and policies.

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[1] The procedures are applicable to other resource dependent communities where at least two strongly held contrasting views, either real or perceived, have created policy inertia.

BACKGROUND

Oconto is situated 32 miles north of the City of Green Bay, and 146 miles north of Milwaukee, on the west shore of Lake Michigan's Green Bay. In the past century, the community prospered as the demand for lumber to build Great Lakes cities such as Chicago combined with the efficient shipment of that lumber from Oconto's port. With the exhaustion of the lumber supply, the community began to lose population, from 6,000 in 1900 to 4,500 in the late 1980's.

The Oconto waterfront, composed of the frontage on the Oconto River and on Green Bay[2], is a fragile wetland resource[3] that can be used by the community in several different and potentially conflicting ways.

For much of its history, Oconto's river and harbor had been a major part of its identity and contributed substantially to its economic viability. Oconto was already aware of its unique waterfront resources and the steady flow of visitors participating in waterfront activities. Yet, the City was unsure of the steps it should take in fostering waterfront development. The City had been making investments in the waterfront, but they could be characterized as piecemeal, stimulated by availability of grants, and with no systematic endorsement by the citizens. The community had reached a historic juncture. The City could <u>not</u> afford to make a substantial investment that could inadvertently foreclose future options especially without citizen input. Oconto wanted a plan for its waterfront that created sustainable economic improvement and reflected general citizen input and support.

Oconto had witnessed the mixed effects of other communities' efforts to use their coastal location as an economic development tool. The Wisconsin coastal communities of Ashland, Manitowoc, Racine and Superior have developed facilities for boaters and encouraged water focused housing and commercial development in attempts to revitalize their communities. Oconto wondered whether developing its waterfront in a similar fashion was advisable.

There were several environmental aspects that demanded attention of the community as well. The river and lake fishery have rebounded with the closure of a pulp mill upstream and associated improved water quality.[4] Yet, the loss

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[2] The juncture of lake, river, and community occurs frequently along the Great Lakes shoreline. With 34 of Wisconsin's 44 Great Lakes coastal communities located at the mouths of rivers like the City of Oconto. The exceptions are about ten communities on the Door and Bayfield peninsulas. This orientation to river mouths is true for most communities throughout the Great Lakes

[3] The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has designated the Oconto area as a Special Wetlands Inventory Study (SWIS) area. The area from Green Bay through Oconto to Marinette contains some of the few remaining Lake Michigan wetlands. This resource is of regional (if not national) significance, but is not widely understood or appreciated by many local interests.

[4] The Oconto waterfront area is used by perch fishermen and those going after Great Lakes trout and salmon species planted by the State.

of those high wage jobs and potential loss of even more in the late 1980s and early 1990s reinforced the image of a growth or preservation dichotomy.

Water levels in the lake and shoaling in the river mouth[5] are perceived a major causes for frequent spring floods. Lake levels, which caused local flooding in 1986, have receded to somewhat below normal. There is much confusion about whether future precipitation trends will favor increased or reduced Lake Michigan levels. The uncertainty about lake levels and flooding create some inertia regarding waterfront development in the low-lying Oconto area.

Species introductions in the Great Lakes have also had an impact on the Oconto area. The closure of the Fox River lock system to prevent sea lamprey migrations, now likely because of improved Fox River water quality, has increased the potential market for Oconto's waterfront developments. But, the recent appearance of the Zebra mussel in the Great Lakes has an uncertain effect on the recreational use of the Oconto waterfront.

While the situation is complex, the City of Oconto and the University of Wisconsin system have sought to expand and share the knowledge base required for informed decision making. Throughout the last decade, a University of Wisconsin - Extension Community Resource Development Agent has been assisting the City, County, and others in assessing the potential for development, the environmental concerns, and the regulatory changes affecting the waterfront. This locally-based educational/technical assistance resource is widely known in the community and works with a diverse group of community and waterfront interests.

The process described here highlights the project's role in an ongoing community effort. Local interest in the Oconto waterfront was present before the project and will continue long after the project ends. A central task in this project was to compile information from technical studies and the community to facilitate the community's discussions of competing options. Forming a local advisory group facilitated the planning process and developed momentum in the community to develop a strategy. The project displayed that the judicious use of community surveys, local facilitators and advisory committees through the cyclic process of asking, listening, analyzing, reporting can generate energy and action in a community to address important concerns by identifying local preferences and generating energy for specific options. The project enabled the community to reframe its choices so the perceived competing options were more complimentary.

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[5] Costs and eligibility for financial support have largely prevented much response to some 1991 US Corps of Engineers recommendations regarding flood mitigation.

WHY WE DID WHAT WE DID

The following list of principles guided our involvement in the community. The reason for itemizing these principles is that a different set leads to other methods of engagement that maybe equally useful. A general statement of the operational paradigm for the project team includes the following:

- the community is a source for change, i.e., also looking inward for support rather than just outward;
- educational interventions can be a stimulus for change, i.e., generate energy and focus to determine and implement community preferences;
- local insights are as valuable as outside technical expertise;
- residents are involved in numerous community activities that began long before and will continue long after the artificial parameters of this specific effort, i.e., community development is a long-term effort;
- directions of indigenously built initiatives are often indeterminant *a priori*, i.e., stay alert and flexible to what the community wishes to do and how they wish to do it;
- the community owns the project and lives with the outcomes;
- economic development, narrowly defined, represents only part of the changes possible in the community;
- decisions are going to be made regarding the waterfront, the basic issue is whose and what values are going to be considered in making the decisions regarding the waterfront, i.e., who will influence the decisions;
- physical/biological/legal issues represent only part of the considerations that need to be addressed in analyzing alternatives for the waterfront, i.e., local acceptability and commitment are also required.

The intellectual journey by the project team could be characterized by the quote "The real difficulty in times of turbulence is less the turbulence and more working with the old logic." Table 1 presents some of the elements of this old and new logic of community intervention. While presented as a dichotomy these elements are really part of a continuum.

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The project team's translation of the foregoing philosophy is evident in the project's emergent design, the efforts to create a holistic approach, the recognition of indigenous knowledge, and inclusiveness.

EMERGENT DESIGN\FLEXIBILITY The rational scientific model is characterized by clearly articulating what the issue is, how you are going to

build and test your hypotheses, and deriving clear and measurable results to draw some conclusions. The procedure is generally linear and well defined at its inception. To avoid corrupting the validity of the outcome tests, only minimal digressions are permitted within the process. This approach assumes that decision making is rational, the relevant stakeholders are at the table, and you can replicate the process to confirm new insights.

The project team started with the classic rational scientific model perspective that all we needed to do was bring information to help people sort out the confusion. This leaves little room for the dealing with the political, social, and interactive nature of community development that often appear to violate the premises of the scientific method [Blakely; Carey; Christenson & Robinson, p. 35; Poston; Reedy & Wallace; Warren].

Emergent design and community development benefits from many of these scientific methodology qualities, but recognizes that the linearity and reductionist aspects may unintentionally restrict the community's activities and choices. Community development is more accurately characterized as circular, cumulative, synergistic, and unstable. The distinction among these elements is neither precise or fixed.

Circular recognizes that changes in knowledge and attitudes require time and constant checking. Furthermore, the circularity arises in that there are seldom clearly defined starting and ending points, just periods of more/less intensity on the local agenda [Cawley; Jones & Silva; Reedy & Wallace]. When external agents (project team) engage citizens in building a strategy regarding their community, it is often easy to overlook this circular continuity. Failure to recognize the circular continuity increases the risk of the intervention being inappropriately focused or timed.

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insert Figure 1 about here

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The ***cumulative*** nature appears because community values and goals initially may not be clearly articulated. It is legitimate for them to emerge through the community development effort, and equally legitimate to address these goals as they emerge, rather than maintaining an unthinking commitment to original plans that are no longer appropriate. Furthermore, past expectations and attempts condition the community's enthusiasm for the current effort [Lackey et al.; Reedy & Wallace; Shaffer].

Synergistic means the sharing, challenging, and blending of local and external knowledge yields an outcome that exceeds the simple sum of these inputs. This interactive approach is very dynamic in that each stakeholder's initial series of alternatives become modified by the exchange among the

different sets of insights.[6] This exchange creates an awareness that previously taken-for-granted ideas may no longer be appropriate. An equally important dimension of synergism is explicit recognition of the interplay among community components. For example, zoning decisions affect housing and commercial development, which influence the type of demand placed on waterfront resources, which may change the nature of the waterfront, and affect the types of zoning requests being made.

Community development can be ***unstable*** because the people involved in a particular project change over time or among projects due to personal reasons, job changes, etc. This creates conditions that require repetition of some elements of decision making and definitely challenge perceptions that 'one shot' interventions are sufficient [Cawley; Chambers & McBeth; Lackey et al.].

HOLISTIC recognizes the interconnectedness among different facets of a community. While prospects for high-value, up-scale investments (i.e., condos, marina development) on the Oconto waterfront was the initial project stimulus, an explicit effort was made to integrate lower impact options recognizing the environmental fragility of the wetlands in the decision making. In many respects holistic captures the distinction between growth and development and appreciates the complexity of community as a system, not just a collection of parts [Shaffer].

INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE means the community also has insights on the problem definition and formulation of alternative solutions. A common method in a community effort is to import expert technical knowledge to 'provide the answer.'[7] An alternative approach changes the fundamental relationship between the 'external experts' and the community. This approach builds on the reservoir of knowledge within the community that can be used in solving community issues (i.e., citizens creating their own solutions) [Cawley; Chambers & McBeth; Lackey et al.].

The blend between external and internal expertise and experience creates alternative solutions that might not be otherwise considered. This approach builds a collaborative[8] relationship between the project team and the community that encourages each to bring their expertise to the partnership. The community residents bring years of observation and discussion about the specifics of the local issue(s), and the experts (project team) bring professional expertise and experience from other locales. Further, any

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[6] This is very similar to the process of becoming a learning organization. see Peter Senge, 1992. The Fifth Discipline.

[7] Oconto did this in its 1979 master plan for the waterfront that offered a technically correct, potentially economically feasible scheme, but reflected minimal citizen input.

[8] Stephen Buxbaum & Robert Ho [1992; 19] define collaboration as more than coordinate and cooperate, but to build new agendas together, to abandon old turfs, to share resources, to act in concert, and to be creative, intentional and deliberate in this sharing process.

effective development option for a community should be premised on community values. Through the sharing of these different sets of knowledge a series of alternatives emerge to be tested against community and professional acceptability.

INCLUSIVENESS is the active engagement of diverse interests and perspectives into the discussion [Luther; Silveria, Shaffer & Behr]. Accepting that a relatively small core group of people will spend the time it takes to examine the problem and alternatives, the perspectives of other stakeholders must also be incorporated in the decision making process [Chambers & McBeth, p. 31]. The project did not accept that those at the table were fully representative of all waterfront interests. There are numerous formal [Johnson et al.] and informal [Blakely; Poston; Warren] ways to acquire the opinions and insights of others. The method chosen depends on time and resources available.

The explicit recognition of emergent design/flexibility, holistic/systems, indigenous knowledge and inclusiveness shaped this effort and how it proceeded.

WHAT WAS DONE?

This section summarizes the steps followed by the project team as it sought to alter the more traditional approaches of community intervention. The project team chose not to follow a more conventional approach of external intervention (e.g., conduct survey of residents using external perceptions of issues and options, minimize number surveyed to statistically acceptable numbers, share results with the community at a public forum with sufficient copies of the technical report for the dedicated citizen). While a bit exaggerated, most of us have experienced the conventional approach. A central theme of this effort was integrating local and external knowledge in a fashion to move local decision making forward.

The circular community development model (Figure 1) synthesizes what was done. The effort started by asking ourselves and community members to define perceptions of the problem and the information needed for decisions. Then the effort moved to what type of insights could be gleaned from that information and sharing it back into on-going community discussions. The aspect that Figure 1 does not convey adequately is the goal is community decisions and actions. These decisions and actions can occur at any point on the circle, but invariably lead to the need to make another decision.

Listening started with a series of open-ended interviews with a dozen individuals concerning waterfront issues to develop the initial resident survey as well as gain an indication of potential membership on the advisory committee. This helped define the issues within the context of the community giving explicit credence to indigenous knowledge.

A key component of incorporating indigenous knowledge is identifying a 'locally acceptable' facilitator at the outset [Chambers & McBeth, p. 33]. The facilitator must be trusted by the community, possess insight into the community's interests and concerns, and be capable of networking among community members. In Oconto, this role was filled by the University of Wisconsin-Extension Community Development Agent.

Community projects without this formal facilitation will be more successful if they identify local person(s) with the ability to provide information and tap resources, share information with local residents from as neutral a perspective as possible. The local facilitator's importance in this process was critical. As part of the community, the facilitator supported advisory committee meetings and continued strategic planning efforts and provided continuity to the process following the completion of the formal project. The facilitator became the link between indigenous and external insights.

The model implied in Figure 1 requires creating a supportive environment for citizen input and decision making. An advisory committee became the major vehicle to incorporate indigenous knowledge and achieve inclusiveness.[9] The advisory committee was representative of different perspectives based on past involvement in waterfront issues. The committee's role was to identify Oconto concerns and preferences among the diverse development/preservation options for Oconto's waterfront resources, The committee provided a reality check on suggestions offered from external sources and the surveys. The committee also pretested the questionnaire and helped refine the questions and options discussed.[10]

A second major function for the advisory committee was strategy development. It was anticipated that advisory committee meetings would serve as an open forum where a wide spectrum of ideas and interests would be expressed (i.e., analyzing). It was not a debating society, nor did it have much power beyond their own personal persuasion to cause anything to happen in Oconto (i.e., no official sanctions). It was anticipated that this forum would integrate technical data as well as survey data to build a long-term strategy for the waterfront. That has not happened, possibly because the planning portion of the charge was not clearly articulated to the advisory committee membership. This represents one of the continuing dilemmas of a

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[9] Although initially composed of 12 people, the committee membership list was expanded several times to 40 people.

[10] The initial drafts of the surveys were pre-tested with the Oconto advisory committee, because they were both potential users of the information and they were drawn from the same population as the respondents. As is the nature of these efforts a continuing problem was controlling enthusiasm to add just one more question. The screen used to challenge each question was - will it tell us anything, including distinguishing different (variation in) perspectives in the community and how will we use the information.

circular flexible agenda — the need to make sure everyone has recognized the shifts in need and purpose.

The advisory committee articulated the need to engage households outside the municipal boundaries because their views and actions would affect the outcomes. Thus, the mail survey included households in the surrounding area, not just the city. The committee also added a visitors survey because visitors' ideas were not fully represented.

The survey served at least one purpose beyond collecting data. Contacting every third household with questionnaires regarding their waterfront interests, concerns and options heightened awareness. The questions reflected Oconto specific concerns and options increased perceptions of appropriateness.[11]

The information collected from the surveys would be of little use if just shared with the advisory committee. Thus, these results were shared more broadly to enable as many citizens as possible to stay informed of the emerging strategy and interest regarding the waterfront (i.e., reporting). The information gathered was shared in a variety of formats and venues. Public forums were anticipated as the primary mechanism for community involvement in information dissemination and strategic planning. But resident survey results indicated that public forums were probably the least effective venue (i.e., willingness to participate). Survey respondents were more interested in newsletters. The dissemination strategy changed as a result of findings from the first survey and advisory committee discussions.

Results of the initial resident survey, the visitor survey, and other research summaries regarding waterfront issues were shared through a series of newsletters to respondents of the initial survey. News releases were used to involve community residents who did not receive newsletters and were not surveyed.

The local facilitator (University of Wisconsin-Extension Community Development Agent) provided informal feedback to the community on the data's implications in various venues like civic clubs. This feedback was especially important since the project team had minimal daily contact with the community. This local facilitator capitalized on the informal and unstructured nature of community discussions.[12] These discussions generated energy, action, and sometimes community decisions.

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[11] The first resident surveys offered sixteen specific economic development options and six specific environmental protection options (see Tables 4 and 5). The second resident survey revisited those and newly created options derived from the first survey responses (see Table 6).

[12] Respondents to the second resident survey indicated that 53 percent frequently or occasionally discussed items raised in the newsletters with their friends.

To solicit diverse perspectives a mail-survey was used to reach out to different stakeholders (users and non-users) whose views were important to decisions about the waterfront (i.e., asking/listening). The project team chose this method because it provided baseline data that could be used to measure the changes in the community once the project was completed (part of the evaluation needs required for project funding). In addition, the mail survey was deemed superior to other techniques, because its wide distribution (one third of the households were contacted) could create heightened awareness within the community about the waterfront. However, it is crucial to realize that mail-surveys are costly and time consuming endeavors that can be distracting rather than additive to the effort [Dillman].

The survey approach used in this study differed from typical community surveys in several fashions. First, two resident surveys were used to identify community interests and consensus. Second, the surveys elicited responses to questions regarding specific options and respondents willingness to support those options with local taxes. Third, in order to get an anticipated minimal 400 responses back, one third of the households in the community were surveyed which was a number that residents remembered, especially when reviewing the lack of disagreement on major community goals. Fourth, both visitors and residents opinions were sought.

The first resident survey was built from two major sources. First, open ended interviews with several local residents solicited their perceptions of the waterfront issues and options they thought relevant. Then, the project team blended the local perceptions with their professional insights. Some of the community interests and goals included use and perceived importance of the waterfront and wetlands, perceptions of neighbors opinions of the importance of the waterfront, preferred options on the future use of the waterfront and wetlands and their willingness to pay for those preferences. The response rate on this 14 page survey was 56 percent, and required mailing a post card and eventually a second copy of the survey to potential respondents.

The second resident survey was mailed only to individuals who responded to the first survey on the presumption that they were more likely to reply (76% response rate) and we were interested in shifts in opinions. This survey was 13 pages and used results from the first survey to focus on more preferred waterfront options and opinions of changes occurring at the waterfront.

The visitor survey was a relatively simple one page intercept survey asked community visitors about their interests. Although several community residents identified visitors as a major potential for the economic future of the community, no systematic inventorying of their interests and concerns had been done. Thus, a major stakeholder, who by their very nature would not be at the table, had their views included.

WHAT HAPPENED?

Project output appeared in two general forms — tangible and intangible. Tangible results were those that the community could easily identify. In many respects, they were the short-term successes that stimulated continued involvement by the community. Intangible outcomes were attitudinal changes in the community that reflect new perspectives of the future and what was possible.

TANGIBLE RESULTS appeared in three forms: survey results, physical activities in the community, and strategy building.

Three surveys were used to involve and define community interests in the waterfront. The first resident survey provided a reading of community interest in the waterfront [Carman, et al.]. Visitors were surveyed to understand their interests and concerns [Behr, et al., 1993a]. The second resident survey gauged changes in attitudes about the waterfront, to get a sense of the most acceptable waterfront strategy, and to determine if the newsletters resulted in any significant changes in residents opinions [Behr, et al., 1993b].

The ***survey results*** indicated a strong interest in the waterfront throughout the community regardless of intensity of waterfront use. Both resident surveys asked about the respondents opinion regarding the importance of the waterfront to the future of Oconto and how they felt their friends and neighbors might judge the importance of the waterfront to the future of Oconto. This series of questions enabled estimating the perception of consensus in the community regarding the waterfront. What these questions uncovered was a substantial reservoir of latent support and interest in the waterfront.[13] Documenting this interest gave community leaders legitimacy for further attention and action.

While the general response pattern on the two surveys was the same, a tendency to estimate neighbor's opinion of importance lower, there was a substantial decline in the difference between own and neighbor's opinion in the first and second survey ranking of "Very Important" and "Important" The difference declined from 20 percent to about 10 percent for respondents to both surveys. The narrowing of the perceived differences suggests residents became aware of the widespread community interest regarding the water front through local publication of the survey results and informal discussions.

It was initially anticipated that at least two perspectives, labelled as "developmental" and "environmental," would have dramatically different

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[13] In the first resident survey, 91 percent of the respondents thought the waterfront was either important or very important for the future of the community. Results from the second resident survey indicated a small increase in proportion of people (93%) believing that the waterfront was either important or very important.

interests and agendas (see Tables 2 and 3). The clusters of perspectives were defined in the following fashion. Environmentalists (15%) gave the strongest answer to at least four of the environmental questions in Table 2. Developmentalist (12%) gave the strongest answer to at least three of the developmental questions in Table 3. Combined (12%) gave the strongest answer to at least four of the environmental questions in Table 2 and at least three of the developmental questions in Table 3. Neither (15%) did not answer any of the questions in Tables 2 and 3 in the highest category. Noncommittal (46%) gave the strongest answer to one to three environmental questions in Table 2, and one to two developmental questions in Table 3). The anticipated dichotomy proved to be a misconception, and project work elements shifted from identifying any possible agreement among the perspectives to emphasizing the large degree of agreement and misperceptions of the other party.

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TABLES 2 AND 3 ABOUT HERE

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Both the first and second resident surveys posed specific possible options for the waterfront. In the first resident survey, these were drawn from the interviews of community knowledgeables. For the second resident survey, refinements of the preferred options from the first survey were used. The results from all three surveys indicated that several options were favored by both residents and visitors. This validation provided legitimacy to and priority for projects.

To gain some sense of how the survey results stimulated a change in the perceived choices requires a brief review of the ***a priori*** perceived choices (Tables 4 and 5). The ***a priori*** perceived choices were construct a marina, dredge the river for flood control and increase upstream access for larger boats, and construct upscale housing in the bayshore area. Many of these ***a priori*** options entailed very costly expenditures and had limited local benefits. None of these ***a priori*** choices were offered in an either/or context, but strength of support for each was solicited (not reported in Tables 4 and 5).

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TABLES 4 and 5 about HERE

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The most interesting aspect of the responses was the choices favored clearly emphasized less costly projects with a much greater potential for local benefits. Facilities supporting shore fishing were among the top development choices on all three surveys. This option was clearly something both Oconto residents and visitors would enjoy using. The residents of Oconto strongly supported trails for walking and biking, although visitors were less supportive of this choice compared to other choices. Another option that

received support from both residents and visitors was informational signs. The support for informational signs by residents indicated their interest in developing Oconto's tourism appeal.[14]

Survey responses indicated which projects Oconto should undertake first and second (see Tables 4, 5, and 6). The results showed the community preferred a strategy to increase tourism as its primary objective, and increasing improvements for residents as the secondary objective. Both 'developmental' and 'environmental' interests favored tourism, although the latter was more concerned with protecting environmental resources. The physical presence of survey data helped overcome conflicting anecdotal data community leaders had been receiving. In this dimension, the oversampling (one-third of households) legitimized the responses to specific options, level of interest in the waterfront, and willingness to pay for waterfront investments increased the survey's usefulness and credibility [Schultz, Luloff & King].

The second major tangible effect of the project was stimulating several ***physical activities*** in the community. These included signs for visitors, Breakwater Park parking and sign improvements, and picnic shelter construction.[15] All of these were highly supported options in the first survey. The survey results prompted the City to apply for funding from the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources to increase shore fishing opportunities. Meetings were held between interested advisory committee members and representatives from adjoining towns and state agencies regarding developing a hiking trail, with interpretive information, in the Oconto Marsh and Breakwater Park area.[16]

The third major tangible effect was a preliminary ***planning exercise*** conducted by the advisory committee. After receiving results from the first resident survey and the visitor survey, the advisory committee used this information to start a physical plan. Each member came to the meeting armed with several projects they thought responsive to the issues emerging from the surveys. A large blank map facilitated the discussion of and location of projects. In total, 25 different projects were mapped. The committee discussed each option and then ranked their preferences. This activity

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[14] The majority of respondents to the first survey felt that tourism benefits the city and did not detract from their personal enjoyment of the waterfront. Sixty percent of respondents to the first survey agreed that tourism would help solve Oconto's economic problems, even though only 28 percent indicated it would benefit them. A substantial number of the options offered in the second resident survey were chosen to attract tourists.

[15] Approximately 94 percent of the respondents to the second resident survey were affirmative about the park changes. This affirmation, re-enforced the advisory committee and municipal officials sense that they were being responsive to the community's interests.

[16] One, initially skeptical, advisory committee member returned from a personal vacation with snap shoots of interpretive trails plus his reactions for the committee to consider.

brought together people from various positions in the community who had the capacity to implement the suggested changes. Also, by considering all of the proposals simultaneously they captured some of the timing aspects and linkages among projects.

INTANGIBLE OUTCOMES represent a second group of results. These are knowledge and attitudes associated with the current status of the waterfront and its future. Intangibles are important because they enable the community to take steps towards shaping the future waterfront to serve their interests. The identification of intangible outcomes is from a focus group conducted with the advisory committee at the close of the formal project.

Several dynamics were present within the advisory committee. First, their reaction to the issues raised by the research and survey work sparked personal interest. Second, they considered both the community and tourists' interests in the waterfront, as revealed by the questionnaires, as they discussed waterfront projects. Third, through contacts in the community, their independent discussions and decisions created spin-off effects that generated actions and decisions outside of the committee, which helped create community ownership of the outcomes.

With minor exceptions, information from the first and second resident surveys showed little conflict between 'environmental' and 'developmental' perspectives within Oconto. Most community residents agreed on the importance of the waterfront and the options to improve the waterfront. The relative cohesiveness of the community's interests was a surprise. The results indicated that if the community moved forward with plans to improve the waterfront, differing views on improving the waterfront appeared reconcilable.

Oconto's waterfront is relatively undeveloped and locals may have previously undervalued this dimension of the resource.[17] A written comment on the second survey recognized this, **"I think this is great that you're asking people about these things. It gets interest up, because sometimes we don't appreciate what we have or take care of it."** Comments like the preceding indicate Oconto residents are shifting how they measured the value of that waterfront resource. Their focus has shifted towards investments enhancing the natural and environmental dimensions of the waterfront.

The focus group disclosed another set of intangible outcomes that may even be more valuable to the community. Words such as **"momentum", "energy", "making connections", "assuming responsibility for the waterfront", "total community involvement",** and **"educating the community"** were heard at the advisory committee focus group. One member said that **"the community will no longer be procrastinating"**. All of this means that the community is ready to

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[17] Oconto representatives at a sports show fedback visitors comments regarding their pleasure about Oconto controlling the development of its harbor unlike many other coastal communities along Green Bay.

take action. The identification of strong interests, support for specific options, and dispelling the community myth about the divisions between developmentalists and environmentalists helped create a sense of assurance to take action.

The most substantial shift in attitude was the community's change in focus from a high-cost, high-risk municipal marina option to a more affordable investment based on visitor and local resident preferences. This shift is much more important than just a change in strategy, it may well mean an entirely different view of itself by the community. The marina option focused outside the community. Potential developers and users came from outside the community. Oconto was trying to become some place that it was not. With the preferences expressed in all three surveys, the community found a series of actions that are relatively low cost and that will be used by locals and visitors. Furthermore, the community will not have to undergo a transformation of its waterfront to accomplish these actions as it would have had to do under the high-cost option. Oconto found a way to increase its appeal to its own residents and visitors by highlighting what it already has — the waterfront's natural beauty, an abundant fishery, and a rich biodiverse marsh.

WHAT WE LEARNED

A potential misconception of the approach used in the Oconto is any endpoint was acceptable. Nothing could be further from the truth. The project's purpose was to address the current and emerging dimensions of the problem(s) the community was addressing, rather than impose a particular technically correct solution. The scientific method has continued importance to community work, yet it represents only one way to work in the community. This manuscript reports a project that applied a much more flexible method that enabled adjustments to emerging refinements of the community's concerns, plus built on the synergism of indigenous and external knowledge growth. An action-learning environment was created.

Surveys, while obviously not the only mechanism, can provide a stimulus to energize community leaders and groups to implement decisions that had only been informally discussed previously.[18] Attempts to move in a logical and linear fashion through a community project may unintentionally yield inertia because of lack of commitment to the perceived results. Rather, community interventions need to solicit continually the evolving community goals to have a lasting positive impact on the community. Furthermore, commitment to an ***a priori*** project or strategy may prevent equally acceptable solutions from being

[18] The inclusion of several action items and soliciting strength of support gave decision makers clear indications of acceptable choices.

explored that yield greater community enthusiasm and benefits. Community interventions need to be particularly sensitive to the ongoing community dynamics (events, decisions) which can influence the current effort. The process of listening, feeding back, active engagement, and translation into action steps increase the prospects of community ownership and further action.[19]

The likelihood of decisions and action increase directly with sense of community ownership of the decisions. The need for continued support of community citizens in fulfilling their goals, while often overlooked or discounted, may be the crucial element for some communities to create a positive and widely accepted future for themselves. The use of surveys with specific questions derived from within the community (i.e.,the advisory committee), the continual feedback, and engagement of the community demonstrates the importance of the local facilitation function.

The survey information from a wide range of constituencies — all residents, visitors, opinions of friends and neighbors — gave a sense of encouragement where previously community decision makers worried their agenda was not representative. The surveys confirmed that there was more agreement than initially suspected.[20] People were more than just economic development or environmentally oriented, and they felt there were alternatives that allowed both. The options offered and responses helped re-frame questions so the community approached a win-win situation (i.e., residents thought ecologically sensitive economic development investments were available).

Initial informal evaluation suggests project activities were largely successful. The surveys collected on resident and visitor interests have already proven useful in planning. The information includes the residents' general attitudes about the waterfront, options which they would prefer to see implemented and a measure of their willingness to finance these options through additional taxes. Also identifying the community's preferred strategies for the waterfront, helps local leaders move forward with some explicit support for general directions.

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[19] While not dictating what needs to occur, it is crucial that the project team stay engaged through the outlining of action steps.

[20] Reflection on the approach suggests it would work in situations where differences were greater, by identifying those elements to start building agreement.

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TABLE 1

OLD AND NEW LOGIC OF COMMUNITY INTERVENTION

OLD	NEW
Planning viewed as	
linear & sequential	circular & repetitive
rational	symbolic, political, social, and rational
facts & empirical knowledge determinant force	indigenous knowledge also considered a determinant factor
outcomes or goals predetermined, measurable	outcomes emerge, develop unfold
reductionist model, discrete elements	holistic, integrative, synthesizing
planning for	creating with
Knowledge viewed as	
scientific, empirical only valid form	intuitive, experiential, etc. also considered
knowledge is product	knowledge is a process
Learning/teaching viewed as	
transfer & transmit body of knowledge	innovative, transformative problem formulating & clustering, broadening perspectives
results measurable	results often symbolic, emotive
Learners viewed as	
passive recipients	actively engaged, self-directed, empowered
Adult educator viewed as	
expert, technician	reflective practitioner or mentor
paternalistically collaborative	learner & educator influence each other

Figure 1

CIRCULAR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROCESS
Asking
Listening
Analyzing
Reporting
Listening

TABLE 2
DEFINING ENVIRONMENTALISTS

1)	Shoreline development on the river - "Very Concerned"
2)	Shoreline development on the bay - "Very Concerned"
3)	Wetlands need to be protected from filling and construction - "Definitely Agree"
4)	The government should purchase remaining undeveloped riverfront and bay front lands to protect their natural character - "Definitely Agree"
5)	Pass zoning requirements that protect scenic undeveloped waterfront property - "Strongly Support"
6)	Remaining undeveloped lands need protection - "Definitely Agree"
7)	I oppose further development of the waterfront - "Definitely Agree"
8)	Do you favor or oppose changing wetlands protection legislation to open these lands for development? - "Strongly Oppose"
9)	Willingness to pay for environmental conservation program "yes" (any amount greater than zero).

TABLE 3
DEFINING DEVELOPMENTALISTS

1	Do you favor or oppose Oconto city government spending money to develop the waterfront to promote tourism spending - "Strongly agree"
2	Tourism development can help solve Oconto's economic problems - "Definitely agree"
3	Development costs should be supported by tax dollars - "Definitely Agree"
4	Dredge river to allow big boats to go upstream and moor near Park St. Bridge - "Strongly Support"
5	Construct a low cost marina for smaller boats (under 20 ft.) - "Strongly Support"
6	Private developers build condominiums at the breakwater - "Strongly Support"
7	Build boat landing near the Park St. Bridge - "Strongly Support"
8	Willingness to pay to improve access and facilities to encourage more tourists to visit Oconto "yes" (any amount greater than 0 - yes)
9	I oppose further development of the waterfront - "Definitely Disagree"
10	Remaining undeveloped lands need protection - "Definitely Disagree"

TABLE 4

TOP THREE PREFERENCES FOR PRESERVING NATURAL FEATURES OF OCONTO WATERFRONT

First Resident Survey

	<---------- Choice ---------->		
	First	Second	Third
n =	349	320	298
Build Boardwalk in Marsh	19.8%	14.4%	11.3%
Build Nesting Structures	19.8	21.6	19.0
Purchase and Protect Underdeveloped Waterfront	12.3	15.0	13.0
Pass Zoning	18.3	19.7	17.3
Build Bike Trail	15.5	15.3	13.7
Purchase Wetlands for Waterfowl	14.3	13.8	25.0

TABLE 5

TOP THREE DEVELOPMENT OPTIONS FOR OCONTO WATERFRONT

First Resident Survey

	<---------- Choice ---------->		
	First	Second	Third
n =	371	349	332
Expand Parking at Breakwater	10.0%	5.3%	2.7%
Construct Restrooms at Breakwater	8.6	10.3	7.5
Short Term Docks at Breakwater	2.2	2.6	3.0
Water Taxi	.5	.6	1.5
Private Condos at Breakwater	3.2	2.6	1.2
Raise Park Street Bridge	2.2	.9	1.5
Dredge River	3.8	5.7	4.2
Mark River Channel	2.2	2.0	3.6
Construct Low Cost Marina for Small Boats	1.9	3.4	3.9
Boat Landing Near Park Street Bridge	4.0	5.2	6.0
Dredge Harbor	16.2	5.2	4.8
No Wake Zones	5.4	8.9	3.3
Canoe Landing at Suzie's	5.1	8.0	6.3
Hiking Trails Along River	12.4	12.6	15.4
Picnic Trails Near River	5.4	16.3	16.0
Improve Access for Handicap	17.0	10.6	18.7

Table 6
Percent Seclecting
1st,2nd, or 3rd Harbor Option

Second Resident Survey

n = 322

Waterfront option	1st	2nd	3rd
Observation trail in marsh	4.0	3.7	4.3
Build multi-use trail for biking, hiking	13.0	12.4	8.1
Establish shore fishing facilities	14.0	10.2	8.4
Adopt & enforce safety laws along river	7.5	4.3	6.2
Signs for visitors to attractions	3.7	7.5	9.3
Picnic tables along river	1.9	5.9	8.4
Fish cleaning station at Breakwater park	2.2	4.3	5.0
Dredge river further upstream	9.3	4.7	1.6
Build eagle's nests in marsh	3.1	6.8	6.2
Purchase wetland for waterfowl habitat	3.7	5.9	3.4
Zoning to protect scenic waterfront prop	5.6	6.2	4.3
Footbridge across river to Holtwood Park	11.5	8.4	10.2
Purchase land to expand Breakwater Park	3.7	3.7	3.7
Mark river channel	5.6	6.2	5.9